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TIN CANS, TUNA & TULIPS

After 110 years of using tin cans, last year, StarKist introduced tuna in re-sealable plastic pouches. $200 million of new revenue later, they've realized the benefit of aggressive change and innovation.

What could this possibly have to do with your green industry business and the California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers? Quite a bit, actually!

The world of agriculture and horticulture today is being impacted by an era of unprecedented and relentless change.

- Labor innovations, breeding, patents;
- The emergence of China as an economic super-power and its impact on the North American economy;
- Hyper-innovation and business market change with every aspect of the farming and commercial horticulture industry;
- Rapid scientific advances, particularly with bio-engineered crops and farming methodologies;
- Regulatory changes, new competitors, and constantly evolving financial services are leading to a world in which individuals and organizations in the agricultural sector are less loyal to members than they were years before;
- Competition is changing overnight, and permanence has been torn asunder.

The fact is we are in a time that demands a new agility and flexibility: we must make sure that we constantly assess and evolve the nature of our services and the manner by which we deliver them. We must be prepared to adapt to new market opportunities at the same time that we manage the complexity of existing ones. And we must recognize that the complexity of the issues we are dealing with—whether it be workforce, business model, customer relationships or other factors—is constantly increasing.

You—the progressive leaders of the industry, CANGC members—must have skill and insight to prepare for a future that is rushing at you faster than ever before. It is clear that in a time of rapid change, opportunity will come from your ability to innovate and change, adapt and evolve, as the very nature of the industry around you begins to change. That's why you need to ask yourself, "what's your tin can?"

What's With the Tin Can?

The change that StarKist undertook to move to a new form of packaging was a huge change—and it took a long time to come about. The fact that it took 110 years provides a good segue into what is perhaps one of the most important leadership issues that you must deal with—getting out of a "tin can rut" in order to deal head-on with the dramatic rate of change that envelopes the industry.

It's 2006. As you made your list of New Years' Resolutions, did you stop to think about whether or not you might be stuck in a 110-year old rut? Still delivering a tin can day in, day out, with no desire to change? There's a lot of change about, and it can be rather difficult to cope with. It's easy to lose your drive, your courage to go forward, and your willingness to change. You might still be thinking tin cans, when everyone else around you is taking a look at the new re-sealable pouches, and are able to aggressively respond to change. That's why the StarKist story is so important. Here's an organization that has somehow shaken away the complacency that enveloped it for over a century. It has woken up to the opportunity that comes from real innovation, and from embracing change. That's your key leadership challenge today, and one that you must begin to manage, before it begins to manage you.

2006 and Beyond: An Action Plan for Change

Rapid times require bold change; action is critical. Thinking differently about what you do is often the first best step to adapting. My advice is simple...resolutions of sorts that you can make that will make a difference in your business this year:

- Forget everything you know. Relearn—quickly. The pace of evolution of knowledge is now so quick that entire careers and industries are changing faster than ever before. Consider this: it is said that 65 percent of the kids in preschool today will work in jobs that don't yet exist. Statistics like this clearly indicate that knowledge is momentary—learn to grab it when you need it, and don't assume that what you know right now will have any relevance tomorrow. Your job from this moment forward is to learn, continuously and relentlessly, about the new challenges that surround you, and how you can adapt to them.
- Get young. Throughout the next year, take the time to listen to young people—anyone 10 years younger than yourself, or even more. They're building the future right now, and you'd do well to understand it. You won't survive in their future if you don't take the time to understand what they are doing, talking about, and thinking.
- Appreciate wisdom. At the same time you listen to young people, be patient with anyone 10 years older than yourself. They might not "get it," and you might find their aversion to change to be frustrating, if not infuriating. The fact is they

possess something that you might not yet have—experience, and the wisdom that comes from "having been there." Your impatience for change might delude you into thinking that things are far easier than they really are; they know better, and have the battle scars to prove it.

- Forget permanence. Everything is transient. Get with the program—everything is temporary, and change is constant. Accept that, and the rest comes easy, since it will help you to focus on what needs to be done, rather than looking back at what was done.
- Make decisions. Don't be someone who asks "what happened?"—make things happen.
- Change your focus. Old glories and corporate nostalgia won't define future success—aggressiveness and adaptability will. Stop thinking about the past, and how wonderful and easy the world used to be. Instead, focus firmly on the future, and the challenges and opportunities that exist. The most important trait that you can work on developing through the next year is becoming more forward-oriented, so that you can spot the trends, opportunities and challenges that will define your future.
- Trap creativity. It surrounds you, and it's a precious resource. The ideas, thoughts, and initiatives of those who surround you can be your most potent weapon. In '06, place less emphasis on innovation-killing buzzwords such as "compliance," "risk management" and "accountability." Re-adapt the buzzwords that count: "brainstorming," "innovation" and "risk taking." We've become far too focused on managing instead of growing, and to deal with the rate of change that surrounds us, we must get back onto a growth agenda.
- Think "clear and present opportunities." Don't focus on the negativity of change—which is all too easy to do.

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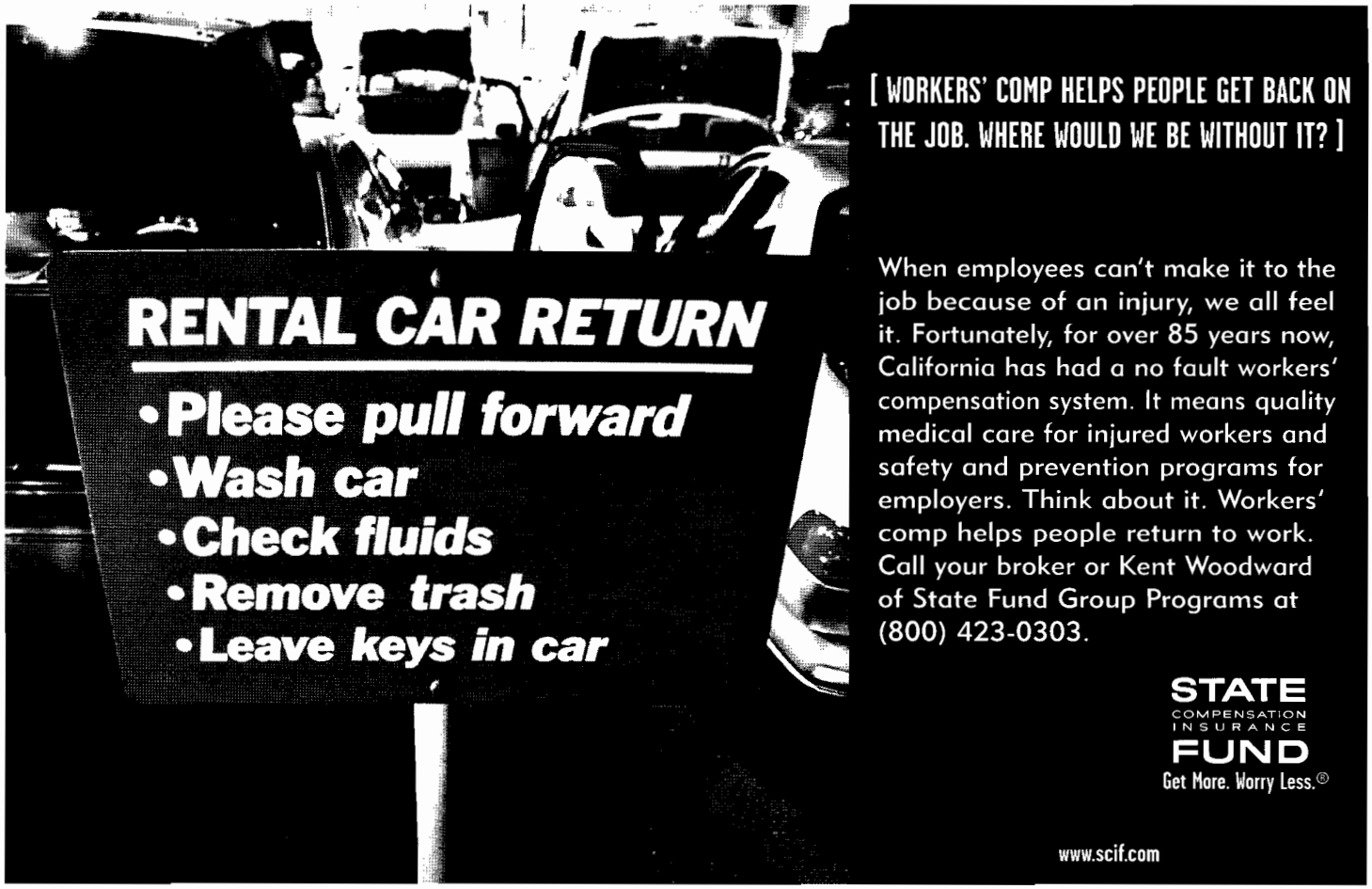
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- Get excited, be happy. Studies show most people don't like change. But if you change your attitude, you'll find that things really can improve. The next year is full of opportunity, and it's yours if you want it!

How Do You Do This?

Adopt ten simple words that will help to get you into the right frame of mind.

- Observe. Take the time on a regular basis to look for the key trends that will impact the world of horticulture. Far too many organizations sit back after a dramatic change and asked "what happened?" Make sure that your company is one that asks, "what's about to happen? And what should we do about it?"
- Think. Analyze your observations: spend more time learning from what you see happening around you. If you are like most companies, you are responding to trends on a short term, piecemeal basis: you are reactive, rather than proactive. Step back, take a deep breath, and analyze what the trends are telling you. From that, do what really needs to be done.
- Change. In a time of rapid change, you can't expect to get by with what has worked in the past—tin cans won't help you—you must be willing to do things differently. Abandon routine; adopt an open mind about the world around you. The world is changing at a furious pace whether you like it or not. Take a look at how you do everything—and decide to do things differently.
- Dare. Have you lost your ability to take risks? Maybe so—yet risk-taking is critical to innovation and change. Work with a few of the new technologies, and try them out. That's the only way that you will be comfortable with what comes next.
- Banish. Get rid of the words and phrases that steer you into inaction and indecision: "We can't do that." "It won't work." "That's the dumbest thing I ever heard." These are the innovation killer phrases—watch for them, and don't permit them to be used.
- Try. How many of your people have lost their ability to adapt to changing circumstances because they've lost their confidence? Developing new skills and career capabilities is critical, given the rapid change occurring around us. Yet too many people have managed to convince themselves that they can't adapt; they can't change. Don't let that happen—it's one of the worst attitudes for going forward into the future.
- Question. Go forward with a different viewpoint by challenging assumptions and eliminating habit. If your approach to the future is based upon your past success, ask yourself whether that will really guarantee you similar results in the future. If you do certain things because "you've always done it that way," then now is an excellent time to start doing them differently.
- Grow. Stop focusing on cutting costs—build your business instead. Don't stand in fear of what you don't know—teach yourself something new. Don't question your ability to accomplish something great—grab the bull by the horns and see what you can do! The point is, in a world of rapid change, you must continually enhance your capabilities and opportunities through innovative thinking. Change your attitude now, and the rest will come easily.
- Do. Renew your sense of purpose, and restore your enthusiasm for the future by taking action. Too many organizations, and the people who work within them, are on autopilot. They go into work each day, and do the same things they did the day before, with the belief that everything today is the same as it was yesterday. It isn't.

Rapid times require bold change; action is critical. Confront your tin cans, and you've got the right leadership frame of mind to take you into the future.

Jim Carroll, a futurist, trends and innovation expert and author of "What I Learned From Frogs In Texas: Saving Your Skin Through Forward-Thinking Innovation," is recognized worldwide for presentations that involve his signature humor, high-level energy, deep insight and challenging observations, and which are based on extensive research and customization. Meet Jim at the ANLA Annual Convention & Learning Retreat in Vail, Colorado on July 12-16.

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